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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 003299

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STATE FOR SCIENCE ADVISOR NEUREITER  
EB FOR A/S WAYNE, PDAS DONNELLY, DAS GADSDEN  
EB/TPP/ATT FOR PEREZ  
E FOR SHUB  
EUR/ERA FOR HEN-NIL  
OES FOR A/S TURNER, PDAS ROCK  
STATE PASS USTR FOR STROJE, NOVELLI  
STATE PASS USDA FOR APHIS:SMCCAMMON, USDA/FAS:BLUM  
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USDA/OS/HEGWOOD  
STATE PASS FDA FOR EFLAMM  
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SUBJECT: WORLD FOOD SUMMIT ENVIGORATES ITALIAN BIOTECH  
DEBATE IN THE MEDIA

REFS: (A) ROME 3214

(B) ROME 2765

1. SUMMARY: THE RECENT WORLD FOOD SUMMIT (WFS5YL) IN ROME PROMPTED THE ITALIAN MEDIA TO FEATURE A HEALTHY DOMESTIC BIOTECHNOLOGY/GMO DEBATE. WHILE FULL LIBERALIZATION OF BIOTECH TRADE WAS PERCEIVED AS A U.S. AGENDA, A NUMBER OF PROMINENT ITALIAN POLITICAL FIGURES QUESTIONED THE ANTI-GMO STANCE OF MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE ALEMANNO AND CAME OUT IN SUPPORT OF FURTHER BIOTECHNOLOGY RESEARCH AND APPLICATION. ARTICLES AND EDITORIALS ON THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF GMOS, THEIR ECONOMIC VALUE TO ITALY, AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO REDUCE WORLD HUNGER ALSO PRESENTED AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY IN A POSITIVE LIGHT. IN THE WAKE OF THIS PUBLIC AIRING OF THE ISSUES, ITALIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IS NOW SHOWING A MORE BALANCED DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUES THAN PREVIOUSLY SEEN IN ITALY. WE ALSO WELCOME THE CHORUS OF OPINION MAKERS THAT HAVE JOINED INTO THE DEBATE, ADMINISTER ALEMANNO HAVING MONOPOLIZED IT FOR SOME TIME. END SUMMARY.

ITALIAN PRESS PORTRAYS BIOTECH ARGUMENTS MORE FAIRLY  
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2. AN EDITORIAL BY UNDERSECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS ALAN LARSON APPEARED IN IL SOLE ON JUNE 7 AND FRAMED MANY ISSUES THAT WOULD BE DISCUSSED DURING THE WEEK OF THE WFS5YL. RECOGNIZING THAT REDUCING HUNGER WILL REQUIRE ACTION ON MULTIPLE LEVELS, LARSON WROTE THAT THE USE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IS ONE OF THE MOST PROMISING METHODS FOR IMPROVING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY. HE ADDED THAT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY AWARE OF THE BENEFITS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY, AND HE OBSERVED THAT BIOTECH ALSO OFFERS ADVANTAGES BOTH TO EUROPE AND TO THE UNITED STATES. ITALY, LARSON CONCLUDED, COULD ASSUME A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN HELPING EUROPE OVERCOME CONTEMPORARY SUPERSTITIONS AND FOCUS ON SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS, REVISING NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY POLICIES THAT BLOCK BIOTECHNOLOGY'S GREAT POTENTIAL TO REDUCE HUNGER, ENCOURAGE RURAL DEVELOPMENT, REDUCE THE USE OF PESTICIDES, AND MANAGE MORE EFFICIENTLY THE PLANET'S SCARCE NATURAL RESOURCES.

3. THROUGHOUT THE SUMMIT, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE ALEMANNO USED THE MEDIA TO CALL FOR A CONTINUATION OF ITALY'S CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY. IN A JUNE 10 EDITORIAL IN IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA, ALEMANNO WROTE THAT THE SUMMIT DECLARATION CALLED FOR AN EXTREMELY PRUDENT OPENING TO GMOS AND LEFT ROOM FOR MULTIPLE POSSIBILITIES. HE THEN LAUNCHED INTO HIS MANTRA THAT GMOS DO NOT MAKE SENSE ECONOMICALLY OR COMMERCIALY FOR ITALY, WHOSE PROBLEM HE DESCRIBED AS NOT PRODUCING MORE BUT SELLING WHAT IT ALREADY PRODUCES. HE ADDED THAT, AMONG THE THREE NATIONAL FARMER ORGANIZATIONS, COLDIRETTI SUPPORTS ZERO TOLERANCE AND THAT CONFAGRICOLTURA AND CIA HAVE NOT SHOWN A STRONG  
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DESIRE FOR GMO USAGE. IN DEFENDING HIS POSITION IN LA REPUBBLICA AND FOGLIO (BOTH JUNE 11), ALEMANNO, ON SEPARATE OCCASIONS, PORTRAYED THE SUMMIT DECLARATION AND HIS COMMENTS TO SECRETARY VENEMAN DURING THEIR BIOTECH MEETING AS VICTORIES FOR INDIVIDUAL CHOICE AND SAFETY OVER THE U.S. OBJECTIVE WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS TOTAL LIBERALIZATION.

4. ON JUNE 12 MINISTER OF PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES ANTONIO MARZANO PUBLICLY ENDORSED GMOS AS A NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT INSTRUMENT IN THE BATTLE AGAINST HUNGER. THE PRESS FOCUSED

ON THE MINISTERIAL DIVISION OVER TRANSGENIC FOOD (REPORTED IN LA STAMPA, FOGLIO, LA NAZIONE, IL TEMPO, AND L'UNITA', JUNE 13). ALEMANNINO, WHO HAS MAINTAINED THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY IS NOT ESSENTIAL TO SOLVING WORLD HUNGER (IL TEMPO, JUNE 12), RETORTED THAT MARZANO, DUE TO HIS MINISTERIAL POSITION, WAS MORE DISPOSED TOWARD USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND WAS EXPRESSING HIS PERSONAL OPINION. HE SUGGESTED THE ISSUE NEEDED TO BE EXPLORED IN GREATER DEPTH IN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND POSSIBLY IN PARLIAMENT (LA STAMPA, IL TEMPO). HE MAINTAINED THAT, ALTHOUGH GMO FOODS MIGHT BE USEFUL IN OTHER COUNTRIES, THEY ARE NOT MARKETABLE IN ITALY (LA REPUBBLICA, JUNE 11) AND IRONICALLY COMMENTED THAT HE WOULD SHAKE THE HAND OF ANYONE WHO WOULD CHOOSE GMO-CONTAINING MOZZARELLA OVER THE D.O.C. VERSION (LA STAMPA).

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AGRE-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00
	CTME-00	DODE-00	ITCE-00	DOTE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00	EXME-00
	E-00	FAAE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	OES-01	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PM-00	ACE-00	SP-00
	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4634  
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
AMCONSUL FLORENCE  
AMCONSUL MILAN  
AMCONSUL NAPLES  
NSC WASHDC

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15. THE JUNE 13 COMMENTS OF PM SILVIO BERLUSCONI AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE WFS5YL WERE CAUTIOUS, BUT, UNLIKE ALEMANNINO, THE PM ACKNOWLEDGED THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURAL BIOTECH. BERLUSCONI REJECTED IDEOLOGICAL AND PREJUDICIAL POSITIONS AND STATED THAT THE PRODUCTIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF GMO SEEDS COULD NOT BE IGNORED. HE ADDED THAT THE FREEDOM OF THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO USE GMOS AND WHOSE HUNGER CAN BE ABATED BY THEM SHOULD NOT BE RESTRICTED BY CONSUMERS WHO DO NOT WANT TO PURCHASE GM PRODUCTS (FOR FULL COMMENTS, SEE ROME 02989). IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA COMMENTED THAT BERLUSCONI'S REMARKS ECHOED POINTS MADE AT THE SUMMIT BY SECRETARY VENEMAN. THERE APPEARED TO BE NO OUTRIGHT PRESS SANCTION OR APPROVAL OF BERLUSCONI'S COMMENTS, BUT NEWSPAPERS REPORTED THEM WITHIN THE LESS PRO-BIOTECH CONTEXT OF FODAG DG JAUQUES DIOUF'S OBSERVATION THAT WATER IS A MORE IMMEDIATE PRIORITY THAN BIOTECH (IL TEMPO), GREENPEACE'S OPPOSITION TO THE PM'S STANCE (IL SOLE), AND ALEMANNINO'S COMMENT THAT THE U.S. AND EU OPINIONS STILL REMAINED FAR APART AT THE CLOSE OF THE SUMMIT (IL TEMPO). IL SOLE STATED THAT THE COMPROMISE REACHED ON BIOTECH BETWEEN THE U.S. AND EUROPE WOULD PROVE TO BE MORE OF A POLITICAL RECONCILIATION THAN A TOOL IN  
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FIGHTING HUNGER (ALL REPORTED ON JUNE 14).

THE MEDIA'S GMO DEBATE: TO MODIFY OR NOT TO MODIFY?

16. THE PRO-GMO/ANTI-GMO DEBATE TOOK PLACE IN THE FORM OF NUMEROUS ARTICLES, INTERVIEWS, AND EDITORIALS. SCIENTIFIC ENDORSEMENTS OF GMOS HELPED BALANCE ALEMANNINO'S ANTI-GMO STATEMENTS AND THE UNFAVORABLE OPINIONS ESPOUSED BY

ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE NGO FORUM. INTERVIEWS WITH NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER NORMAN BORLAUG (LA NAZIONE, JUNE 13, SEPTTEL), PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES TOMMASO SCARASCIA MUGNOZZA (IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA, JUNE 9), AND FORMER MINISTER OF HEALTH VERONESI (IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA, JUNE 11) ALL SPOKE TO THE HEALTH SAFETY OF GMOS, NOTING THAT CONVENTIONAL FOODS DO NOT CARRY ZERO RISK. IN ITALY'S ELITE, CLASSICAL LIBERAL DAILY (IL FOGLIO, JUNE 13), THE EDITORIAL "BIOTECH FOOD TRIES HARD TO BECOME NICER (AND MORE USEFUL)," ARCHLY OBSERVED THAT 99 PER CENT OF THE 70 PER CENT OF ITALIANS WHO OPPOSE GMO FOOD WOULD REGARD A WORM IN THEIR PRODUCE WITH DISGUST, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THESE PARASITES ARE THE ONLY POSITIVE PROOF THAT THE FOOD HAS NOT BEEN GENETICALLY MODIFIED.

17. IN HIS CORRIERE INTERVIEW, SCARASCIA MUGNOZZA (A WHEAT BREEDER FROM THE 1960S) NOTED THAT HE SAW SIGNS OF AN OPENING IN THE GOVERNMENT THAT COULD ALLOW ITALY TO JUMP BACK ON THE BIOTECH TRAIN AND STRESSED THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY IN AGRICULTURE IS NECESSARY IF ITALY WANTS TO BE COMPETITIVE. IN AN EDITORIAL SPEAKING TO THE ENTREPRENEURIAL TUSCAN SPIRIT, PRESIDENT OF THE FLORENCE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LUCA MANTELLASSI TALKED OF THE  
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PROPORTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC GROWTH AND LAMENTED ITALY'S RELATIVELY LOW LEVEL OF INVESTMENT DEDICATED TO SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH (LA NAZIONE, JUNE 11.) THE UTILITY THAT GMOS COULD HAVE IN ALLEVIATING WORLD HUNGER WAS HIGHLIGHTED OFTEN IN VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE DAILIES, AND IL FOGLIO MADE A REFERENCE TO THE STUDY BY UNIVERSITY OF MILAN PROFESSOR FRANCESCO SALA SHOWING HOW ITALIAN AT-RISK "TYPICAL" PRODUCTS COULD BE SAVED BY BIOTECHNOLOGY. A JUNE 12 EDITORIAL IN IL CORRIERE COMMENTED THAT GMOS WERE A NATURAL STEP IN THE AGRICULTURE CONTINUUM, THAT ITALIAN AVERSION TO THEM RESULTED MORE FROM THEIR LACK OF BEING CHIC THAN FROM ANY SCIENTIFIC OPPOSITION, AND THAT IT WOULD BE IMMORAL TO ALLOW RICH CONSUMERS' DIFFIDENCE TOWARD GMOS TO PRECLUDE THEIR USE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER.

18. OPPOSITION TO GMOS, ASIDE FROM ALEMANNO'S ASSERTION THAT THEY DID NOT MAKE SENSE FOR ITALY, WAS REPORTED MAINLY IN THE CONTEXT OF NGO OBJECTIONS, WHICH CONTRADICTORILY CALLED FOR ZERO TOLERANCE AND AN END TO PATENTING. WHILE SOME PAPERS TENDED TO PORTRAY NGO ACTIVISTS AS SLIGHTLY EXTREME AND IRRATIONAL, OTHERS FEATURED ACTIVISTS IN MORE POSITIVE INTERVIEWS. L'UNITA', THE PAPER OF THE PRO-DEMOCRATIC LEFT PARTY, GAVE PARTICULARLY STRONG ATTENTION TO THE ACTIVISTS' CAUSE, STRESSING THAT IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING THE

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INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AGRE-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00
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	E-00	FAAE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01	JUSE-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00
	AC-01	NSAE-00	OES-01	OMB-01	OPIC-01	ACE-00	SP-00
	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	EPAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY ROME  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4635  
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
AMCONSUL FLORENCE  
AMCONSUL MILAN  
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ENVIRONMENT AND ASSURING THAT THE RIGHTS TO A REGION'S BIODIVERSITY AND LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF THE LOCAL POPULATION. THE CONCERN THAT MULTINATIONALS MIGHT MONOPOLIZE PROFITS TO THE DETRIMENT OF POOR FARMERS (THROUGH PATENTING, TERMINATOR SEEDS, ETC.) WAS A THEME RAISED IN IL CORRIERE DELLA SERA, IL TEMPO, AND L'UNITA', AMONG OTHERS. PROTESTERS' OCCUPATION OF A UNIVERSITY RESEARCH FACILITY NEAR VITERBO LATE IN THE WEEK RECEIVED WIDESPREAD COVERAGE, CALLING ATTENTION TO THE CONTINUED OBJECTIONS RAISED TO NGO RESEARCH. NOTE: ACTUALLY ONLY ABOUT 40 PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED IN THE UNIVERSITY OF TUSCIA INCIDENT. END NOTE.

19. COMMENT: THE SUMMIT TEMPORARILY TRIGGERED A TREMENDOUSLY INCREASED QUANTITY OF PRESS COVERAGE ON BIOTECH. NEWS COVERAGE IN THE CORRIERE DELLA SERA, IL GIORNALE, LA NAZIONE, AND IL FOGLIO WAS THE MOST COMPLETE, FEATURING BOTH SIDES, RATIONAL ARGUMENTATION, AND THE OBSERVATION THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY, LIKE MANY OTHER TOOLS, CAN BE USED TO BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ENDS. IL FOGLIO, IN FACT, EXPRESSED ITSELF IN FAVOR OF A MORE OPEN GMO POLICY. OVERALL, THE PRO-BIOTECH SIDE WAS BETTER REPRESENTED THAN  
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IT NORMALLY IS IN ITALIAN PRESS. IL TEMPO E L'UNITA' TENDED TO BE MORE CRITICAL OF BIOTECHNOLOGY AND TO WORRY ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL, ETC. RISKS OF GMOS. CONCERNS THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY WILL ONLY BENEFIT MULTINATIONALS AND THAT GMOS WILL HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON BIODIVERSITY HAVE EMERGED IN THE MEDIA AS AREAS OF CONTENTION THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED. END COMMENT.

110. THIS CABLE WAS PREPARED BY SCIENCE INTERN LEIGH SYLVAN.

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